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AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAVY OFFICER
FITNESS REPORT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO THE PROMOTIONAL SYSTEM

DELORES Y. ACOSTA

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AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE
PROMOTIONAL SYSTEM

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Delores Y. Acosta

AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAVY OFFICER FITNESS REPORT
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE
PROMOTIONAL SYSTEM

by

Delores Y. Acosta
Lieutenant, United States Navy

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
MANAGEMENT

United States Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California

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NEW ARCHIVE
1945.06
AGOSTA, D

LETTER FROM D. AGOSTA TO THE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

I am very pleased to hear of your
recent visit to Italy.

Yours very truly,
D. AGOSTA

Enclosure

cc - Mr. [illegible]

Very truly yours,
D. AGOSTA

AN ANALYSIS OF THE NAVY OFFICER FITNESS REPORT
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE
PROMOTIONAL SYSTEM

by

Delores Y. Acosta

This work is accepted as fulfilling
the research paper requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN

MANAGEMENT

from the

United States Naval Postgraduate School

ABSTRACT

In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze the philosophy and methodology of the promotion system in the United States Navy. The particular portions of the promotion system discussed include the Fitness Report and the promotion board. Since the major criterion for an officer's success in the Navy is the performance reflected in his Fitness Reports, special emphasis has been given to this area. The historical development of the Fitness Report is reviewed with particular attention to the rating scales employed. In addition, the problems involved in the preparation of the Fitness Report are explored. Some of these problems involve the biases of the evaluator, the inconsistencies in the form itself, as well as the instructions pertaining to it, and the peculiar multi-purpose nature of the Fitness Report system. Finally, recommendations for further and future research based on the findings of this paper are proposed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much research, published and unpublished, has been directed toward the improvement of performance rating in both the civilian and military setting. The research efforts of the writer disclosed numerous volumes devoted to merit rating in industry and a preponderance of research devoted to performance appraisal in the military. Such research is just one indication of the continuing interest in man's judgment of other men.

For years, before the emergence of sophisticated appraisal forms, men were appraising other men's behavior and ability. As the years passed and small groups developed into large organizations, these personal appraisals were committed to writing. In viewing these written appraisals, an important lesson was learned: men, as human beings, differed in their abilities as judges. Today, in 1965, despite all the innovations and research, the problem still confronts the organization; man still differs in his ability to judge.

The evolution of the United States Navy's performance appraisal form for officers, the Report on the Fitness of Officers,¹ is a striking example of the struggle to systematize men's judgments. For years, efforts have been directed toward motivating superior officers to divorce opinion from fact and to learn to make distinctions among their subordinate officers along the whole performance range, rather than only the extremes. The issue is important in the military because it is these men's judgments which will be the foundation for officer promotion. The significance of the Fitness Reports to every naval officer's career cannot be overemphasized.

¹Hereafter the Report on the Fitness of Officers will be referred to as Fitness Report.

Purpose of the Study

It is the purpose of this study to explore the significance of the Navy Fitness Report and to relate it to the overall officer promotion system.

Specifically to be examined in this paper are the procedures of the Navy promotion board, as the primary determinant of officer success. In addition, this study will present a critical analysis of the philosophy and methods of officer evaluation in the past, as well as the present.

Importance of the Study

From the first day that an officer sews on his stripes and reports for duty, whether in a school or on board a ship or station, his performance is being evaluated. The vehicle by which his performance is rated and reported is the Fitness Report. His initial Report and every Report which follows is filed in the Bureau of Naval Personnel in a special folder referred to as the "Fitness Report Jacket". Unlike many reports, the Fitness Report is not inactive; that is, it does not lie dormant in the files. Nor is it only the basis for occasional statistical analysis. Rather, it is the major criterion upon which an officer's future is determined.

Many of the personnel actions taken by the Bureau of Naval Personnel involve the use of an officer's Fitness Report. Officers are informed by memoranda, instructions, notices and other media of its importance in the determination of duty and school assignments, as well as augmentation into the Regular Navy. In addition, the Report forms the basis for command selection for both aviation and surface operation commands -- a most important and necessary selection requirement for the line officer who aspires to higher rank. Finally, of most importance, the Fitness Report represents the major criterion -- performance -- for selection for promotion.

Because of the effect the Fitness Report and selection for promotion have on an officer's future, the writer is concerned that many junior officers lack a working knowledge of the processes involved. While officers may read the Bureau of Naval Personnel publications concerning these issues, it is the writer's opinion that much of the information they retain is based on hearsay, passed on from others who are also uninformed. Some have complained that the Report and the promotion board are "veiled in secrecy"; this is offered as the reason for their lack of understanding. While this paper cannot hope to answer all the questions, it contains as much information about the Fitness Report and the promotion board as the writer was able to draw from the sources available. These sources include reports from the Bureau of Naval Personnel and the U. S. Naval Personnel Research Activity, San Diego, the U. S. Army Human Research Unit, Monterey, and information from unpublished theses from the U. S. Naval Postgraduate School and other universities.

Definition of Terms Used

Reporting senior. For purposes of this paper, "reporting senior" includes all reporting seniors as defined by the Bureau of Naval Personnel. These include: (1) the regular reporting senior; (2) the concurrent reporting senior; and (3) the delegated reporting senior.

Promotion board. In this study, the term "promotion board" refers to the formal phrase "selection board from promotion". This term is used to distinguish the selection board for promotion from other "selection boards".

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

In Chapter II, a presentation of promotion board procedures will be made. Incident to this, the selection of criteria by the board is discussed.

In Chapter III, the evolution of the Fitness Report, (both in form and content), is examined. Individual selected Report forms are analyzed with

respect to rating scales. In addition, particular emphasis is placed on the present (1962) Report form, noting its proliferation of the rating scale from the 1923 report. Of particular interest in this chapter is a discussion of the 1962 proposal to include an evaluation of the "officer-wife team".

In Chapter IV, the actual problems involved in the preparation of the Fitness Report are explored. The three areas under study are: (1) the rating errors, or biases of the evaluator; (2) the inconsistencies and/or gaps existing in the Report form and its related instructions today; and (3) the multi-purpose nature of the Fitness Report system.

Chapter V summarizes the paper, drawing conclusions based on the findings of the study, and makes recommendations for further and future research.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE ROLE OF THE PROMOTION BOARD

The Navy employs a single promotion system which is closely prescribed in law, detailed as to procedures, with minimum provision for the exercise of administrative discretion. Perhaps the most important time for an officer is that time when his name appears before a promotion board which is charged with the responsibility to recommend for promotion those selected officers who, in the board's opinion, are professionally qualified to perform all the duties of the next higher grade.

When the time comes that your name appears before a selection board, just relax--because it's then too late for you to do anything about it. The members of your board take over at that point, and your fate is in their hands. (Department of the Navy, 1959a, p. 9).

In view of the importance assigned to this one phase of the promotion system, what general information concerning the role of the promotion board is available to every officer whose "fate" is indeed in the hands of this board?

I. COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

The board members are considered to be the top talent available in the Navy, chosen for their integrity and breadth of experience; there can only be selected those who have never failed of selection to any grade up to and including the one in which they serve as board members (Department of the Navy, 1959a). The final composition of each board is approved by the Secretary of the Navy and the board members' names are initially withheld from publication so that individual members will not be influenced in advance (Lee, 1963). The membership is specially designated by the Secretary of the

Navy¹ to act in the cases of officers designated for special duty in the fields of naval intelligence, law, communications, public information; in the cases of officers designated for engineering duty, aeronautical engineering duty, limited duty; and in the cases of officers not restricted in the performance of duty. When women officers are considered for promotion the membership also includes two WAVE officers. The board is also composed of a recorder, although if the work is extremely heavy, assistants to the recorder are designated. Statutory requirements disallow the selection of any board member to serve on the same board for two consecutive years (Department of the Navy, 1959a).

II. PRE-CONVENING PROCEDURES

Prior to convening the board there are briefings by the Chief of Naval Personnel and his staff. These briefings cover the gamut of: (1) the current officer promotion situation; (2) the number of officers in the promotion zone and above the zone who have previously failed of selection; (3) the percentage of the zone which has been authorized for selection in each category and specialty; and (4) the number of officers eligible for selection by reason of service in grade but who have not yet reached the zone (Scanland, 1963). Also covered are the needs of the Navy as a whole for officers in the grade to be selected and the various laws and regulations affecting promotions (Lee, 1963). At this time it is made clear to the board members that they are free to choose any rules and procedures they wish within the scope of the Secretary of the Navy's precept to the president of the board (Lee, 1963). "No rules are prescribed on the detailed procedures to be followed by a selection board in the selection process." (Department of the Navy, 1964a, p. 6-15)"...the methods by which the board

¹The senior member is designated as president of the board.

will arrive at its decisions, the weights which it will give to the various factors in the records it reviews and the manner of voting are matters which each board decides for itself." (Scanland, 1963, p. 41).

III. CONVENING THE BOARD

After the briefings by the Chief of Naval Personnel and his staff, the members and recorder(s) are administered an oath and then the precept from the Secretary of the Navy is read. This precept includes such items as:

1. the numbers of officers in each category and specialty whom the board may recommend.
2. the percentage of officers below the promotion zone whom the board may recommend.
3. considerations of the requirements of the future.
4. the requirement that the board report the names of officers whose records, in their opinion, indicate unsatisfactory performance in present grade and probable inability to satisfactorily perform the duties of a higher grade (Secretary of the Navy, 1964).

IV. GENERAL PROCEDURES FOLLOWED BY THE BOARD

The writer was able to find only two references to the screening procedures employed in their particular boards (Lee, 1963; Scanland, 1963)². Both accounts are very similar. Perhaps the most important step in the procedure involves the choosing of criteria for determining those officers who are best fitted or best qualified for promotion. Vice Admiral Lee, in describing the procedures of the selection board on which he served, stated:

The board deliberates at great length in trying to choose the criteria for determining the "best fitted". In arriving at these criteria and other procedures, the board keeps in mind the views of the Chief of Naval Personnel in the original briefing. They ask themselves many penetrating questions before laying down specific criteria. (Lee, 1963, p. 2).

²The information contained therein has been screened by the Bureau of Naval Personnel and is valid. The opinions expressed are strictly those of the authors, however.

The reader is reminded that each board may arrive at these criteria in its own manner.

The members attempt to reach as common a ground for marking and judging records as is possible, and a period of time is spent ensuring that the members do in fact understand the ground rules. After these preliminary activities terminate, the board commences the record-reviewing process. Because of the volume of records, each member cannot possibly review every record. Instead, he reviews, on the average approximately 30 to 50 records daily, or whatever number the members can review while still giving proper attention to all the details (Lee, 1963; Scanland, 1963). To assist the members in this undertaking, clerks assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel prepare briefing, or summary, sheets for each officer's record and these sheets are then attached to the Fitness Report jacket. The summary sheets include such information as:

1. an officer's education
2. correspondence courses completed
3. special qualifications
4. discipline
5. medals and awards
6. a summary of all commands in which the officer served; type duty assigned; number of months served; reporting senior and his grade; and a compilation of marks received in the areas of present assignment, desirability, comparison with other officers of his grade and approximate length of service, and qualities of leadership.
7. for each Report, the number of officers of the same grade with whom the officer was compared.
8. a remarks section for additional comments the reviewing member may care to add.

In essence then, a resume of an officer's career is condensed on these summary sheets. The board member uses these sheets along with the selection jacket, which contains all information on file of concern to an officer's career, the health record and the Fitness Report jacket to complete his final evaluation of the record.

It is important to emphasize that the brief sheets are only a helpful device--they don't make or break you--selection or non-selection is based on a very thorough analysis of each officer's entire record. (Lee, 1963, p. 2).

Interesting to note, however, are Captain Scanland's comments concerning the briefing sheets:

The beauty of the briefing sheets is immediately apparent. Many records, in fact most of them, are clearly "promotable" records. This is obvious at a glance from the briefing sheets, and if the percentage to be selected is high . . . , those qualified as "best fitted" show up quite clearly, as do those not fitted. It is the officers with some anomaly in the pattern of their records, with some question about their performance not readily answerable, who pose the problems . . . (Scanland, 1963, p. 45).

Each day, at a prescribed time, the members adjourn to the briefing theater where each briefing sheet is projected on a screen so that they can all see it simultaneously. The member responsible for reviewing the record in question describes the record in detail and answers the questions of the remaining members concerning matters which may not appear on the briefing sheet. When each member is satisfied that he has all the information he needs to vote for or against a record for selection, a vote of all members is taken by the president. An officer is "in the running" if he receives at least two-thirds of the members' votes.

After all eligible records have been reviewed and voted upon, the recorder counts the number of officers who have been initially selected for promotion and the results are reported to the president of the board. Should the count reveal that the board has selected too many officers, the records with the least number of votes are again reviewed as before and another vote taken. Depending on the number which must be dropped from the list, voting continues until the authorized number is reached. Similarly, should the count reveal that the board did not select enough officers, the

records with less than two-thirds of the votes are reviewed and voting continues until the authorized number is reached.

Upon completion of its selections the board reconstitutes itself as an examining board and recommends for promotion those selected officers who, in its opinion, are professionally qualified to perform all the duties of the next higher grade. When this task is completed, the report containing the official lists of names of officers whom the board has recommended is submitted to the President of the United States via the Chief of Naval Personnel, the Judge Advocate General of the Navy to ensure the legality of the report, and the Secretary of the Navy. Should there be any question or disapproval rendered by these authorities the board would reconvene for further deliberations. Once the recommendations meet the approval of the President and confirmation by the Senate, the list is released and the board members, now through with their formidable and prodigious task, are also released.

V. SUMMARY

In view of the importance of the actions of the promotion board in determining an officer's future, the writer attempts to furnish information concerning all promotion boards in general. While there is a paucity of information in this phase of the promotion system, the writer was able to draw information from one official publication and two articles which were written by former promotion board members. These three sources are condensed in order to provide the reader with a general knowledge of how board members are chosen, pre-convening procedures, and general procedures followed by the board after it has been convened.

Special emphasis is given to the point that each individual board develops its own criteria. These criteria are not set forth in writing as they are

developed in consonance with the grade being selected and the needs of the Navy, as determined by the collective experience and judgment of the board (Department of the Navy, 1958). However, a brief description of some of the items found in the precept by the Secretary of the Navy to the president of the board is presented. A copy of a recent precept convening a board for the recommendation of officers of the line of the Navy on active duty for temporary promotion to the grade of commander (Secretary of the Navy, 1964) offers some insight into the considerations of requirements of the future the board is to make. One such consideration is the increasing emphasis given to competence in technical and management responsibilities, though this is not to outweigh demonstrated outstanding performance in operational billets. The ideal situation would have the line officer capable in both operations and a subspecialty. This concept is supported by the results of deliberations by the board headed by Rear Admiral Combs to study billet requirements and grade distribution (Semmes, 1965). This board found that the unrestricted line officer will have to become proficient in two areas: in command at sea and naval warfare and in a particularly subspecialty. In essence, although each promotion board attaches varying importance to such criteria as postgraduate education and technical achievements, it appears that it must give primary consideration to performance of duty and career pattern.

In connection with career patterns, it is interesting to note how the trends are slowly changing. Results of a study conducted by Van Riper and Unwalla (1965) indicate that up through 1959, in terms of rank potential, operational duty ran well ahead. General staff experience such as the Joint Staff and the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations ranked in the middle position, with support activities well behind in third place. Support

activities were defined as those involving administrative duties, technical duties, and supply. They did indicate, however, that while the chances for high rank have been the greatest for those in operations, the prospects for officers in support activities are improving.

The writer briefly describes the summary sheets, the importance of which is not quite clear. Lee (1963) pointed out that they were only helpful devices which "don't make or break you." Scanland (1963) appeared to attach more importance to them. Since proceedings of the board cannot be disclosed by board members, except as authorized by the Secretary of the Navy, the issue must remain unresolved.

Finally, the general voting procedures of the board are explained. To state that the task of this board is formidable, if for no other reason than sheer volume, would be an understatement. It requires complete dedication without prejudice or partiality.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE FITNESS REPORT

That the Fitness Report constitutes the most important part of a naval officer's record can be evidenced by Bureau of Naval Personnel instructions, articles found in the Officer Personnel Newsletter and other periodicals, personal memoranda from the present and former Chiefs of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, research papers, and perhaps most important, the United States Navy Regulations. Article 1701 of these regulations states:

The fitness of an officer for the service with respect to promotion and assignment to duty is determined by his record. Reports of Fitness are decisive in the service career of the individual officer,. . . The preparation of these reports is, therefore, one of the most important and responsible duties of superior officers. (Department of the Navy, 1948, p. 223).

The Bureau of Naval Personnel further emphasizes the importance of Fitness Reports in its instructions:

They provide a record of the duty performed and the manner of its performance, the professional qualifications of the officer, commendatory or censorious matter received by him, notation of any disciplinary action, . . . , any special qualifications possessed by the officer, and a statement of his personal characteristics.

Fitness reports are the primary basis for selecting officers for promotion and assignment for duty. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 1).

Rittenhouse (1952) noted that the Fitness Report should permit a promotion board to obtain an accurate picture of an officer without the necessity of calling him before the board in person.

Not only is an officer's Fitness Report the key to the selection for promotion and general assignment, but it is significant in such matters as consideration for command, education and continuation. It follows, therefore, that the Report should effectively discriminate, in terms of quality, among naval officers. Because of this requirement the Fitness Report system

has been monitored periodically by the Personnel Analysis Division of the Bureau of Naval Personnel. If statistical analyses show that Fitness Report forms are losing their effectiveness as a rating system, corrective action is initiated (Department of the Navy, 1956a). Much corrective action has been taken over the years. While history is a thing of the past, knowledge of the efforts of those in control of the system to seek improvement will give insight to the reader as to the theories of performance evaluation through the years. Bureau of Naval Personnel Research Report 56-2 (Department of the Navy, 1956b), is perhaps the only detailed historical report of the evolution of the Navy's Fitness Report. Unless the writer notes otherwise, the historical development to follow is extracted from that report.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The procedures embodied in the Fitness Reports which have been used over the years have been an outgrowth of the laws and changes in naval regulations regarding promotion, retirement, and separation and have been designed to assess the abilities and performance of naval officers in a fair and unbiased manner. Revisions have resulted from the inadequacies of earlier forms, obsolescence of certain items, or operational problems in the use of the form. Throughout all these changes similar objectives have prevailed, that is, (1) to incorporate more objective traits and systems of rating officers into new forms to maximize fair consideration of all officers; and (2) to make available to the Navy the best information for use in selection, promotion, assignment, and related personnel actions. On the other hand, in his study of naval officer performance appraisal, Legare (1965) contended that the changes were due to "deeper and more fundamental factors." These factors are: (1) a tremendous growth in physical, technical, political and

financial size and stature of the Navy; and (2) a redefined national interest--from a "fortress America" to a nation participant in world affairs. The writer believes that the latter line of reasoning is logical and that one is partially the outgrowth of the other. The point remains an academic one and is not considered important to this paper. What is important is that there have been changes as time and ideas have changed.

II. CHANGES FROM 1818 to 1865

In 1818, the earliest date that researchers have found reference to reports made on officers in the U. S. Navy, the commanding officer made a narrative report on the character of each officer serving under him, subsequent to paying off the crew. He also wrote narratives concerning the conduct of officers during battle and normal ship evolutions upon completion of a cruise. While it was not indicated how the reports would be used, "it [was] hoped that the reports would in some way supplant the common system of promotion by political and personal favoritism." (Morin, 1961, p. 1). This type of reporting existed until 1825 when rule established that commanders would write detailed reports on the character, conduct, and attainments of officers. At this time the requirement for periodic submission of reports appears to have been established as reports were to be submitted semi-annually. This narrative report continued to be utilized until 1841 when, in addition to reporting the professional skill and attainments of commanders of vessels and the order and efficiency in which they kept their vessels, commanding officers had to make quarterly reports concerning the attention which their officers gave to their studies. This latter report was a requirement whenever someone was assigned to the commands for the explicit purpose of instructing the officers.

III. CHANGES FROM 1865 to 1891

The days of the detailed narrative report ended in 1865. At first, reporting seniors worded the answers to items asked with brief descriptions of their impressions. Also interesting to note is that three forms were introduced, one for commanding officers of squadrons, divisions, and vessels, the second for line officers, other than commanding and the third, for staff officers. Although no mention of selectivity in the detailing of officers was made in the regulations governing these reports, the general feeling was that this was the Navy Department's intent. In addition to the new forms, line and staff officers were graded on their ability to speak other languages.

Later in the same year the numerical scale replaced the brief descriptions. Words which described the degree to which an officer performed his duties were assigned a numerical value as follows:

Excellent = 5	Indifferent = 2
Very good = 4	Bad = 1
Good = 3	

The year 1865 proved to be a historical year for still another reason. For the first time, reports were to be completed on officers assigned to yards and stations and therefore, all officers were now placed under the reporting system.

Reference to the three report forms was omitted in 1870 and until 1891 no mention was made of any report on the standing or attainment of officers. However, during this period, there were requirements to report the punishments awarded to officers and the reasons therefor.

IV. CHANGES FROM 1891 to 1909

In 1891, printed forms using the heading "Report on the Fitness of Officers", which applies to date, were published. Now there were two forms, A and B, for reporting on officers in command afloat and for all other

officers, respectively. There was no distinction made among officers in command ashore, those not in command, or staff officers. A new item to be rated on both forms was performance in special duty assignments. Form B added new items such as attention to duty and extra-ordinary performance of duty. Both forms eliminated the term "morals" and substituted the word "sobriety", a quality that commanding officers were to report on in 1818. Of special interest to the writer is the fact that for the first time an officer, other than one in command afloat, was graded on the efficiency of the men under his control. Numerical scales were eliminated and descriptive words, such as excellent, good, tolerable, and not good, returned.

Two "firsts" occurred with these Reports. First, if the answer to any query was "not good" or of an unfavorable nature, the reasons for such answer were to be clearly stated. The intent, although not mentioned, was undoubtedly to cause the reporting senior to commit himself in writing rather than to recklessly assign low marks without good reason. A quotation from an officer's evaluation which appeared in one of the first recorded efficiency reports in the files of the War Department, dated August 1813, provides a good example of reckless assignment without good reason: "The very dregs of the earth, unfit for anything under heaven. God only knows how the poor thing got an appointment." (Rajski, 1964, p. 25).

Second, if any evaluation was of an unfavorable nature, a copy of that portion of the Report was to be furnished to the officer concerned, who could prepare a written statement if he desired.

The year 1893 was significant in that the first regulations to contain an article on the fitness of officers were published. For the first time an instruction was promulgated directly for the reporting senior. Article 273 of Regulations for the Government of the United States Navy, 1893 charged

reporting seniors with preparing the Reports with care and deliberation in view of their importance to the Navy and to the officers concerned (Department of the Navy, 1956b).

In 1894, the descriptive word "tolerable" constituted an unfavorable Report leaving only two categories considered as favorable, "excellent" and "good".

In 1895, a second reference was made to reporting seniors. Added to the instructions was a statement which informed reporting seniors that they should base their answers to queries upon the record of the officer during the entire period covered by the Report. Later in the year, three forms were in use. Forms A and B were used for officers in command afloat and for all other officers performing service afloat, respectively, and form C was used for all officers on shore duty. Subsequently, forms A and B were revised. The new form B made provision for a reporting senior to state whether he objected to having the officer under his command and if the officer could be entrusted with hazardous and important independent duties.

The descriptive word "very good" was added to the marking system in 1900 after having been deleted in 1891. This addition thereby allowed three categories to be considered as favorable, "excellent", "very good", and "good".

V. CHANGES FROM 1909 to 1923

A complete revision occurred in 1909. Only two forms were used, form A for all commanding officers ashore and afloat and form B for all other officers. These forms were expanded to four pages and many of the items which were included on earlier forms were now subdivided into several categories. An example of this division is the item "efficiency of command".

In previous Reports, the reporting senior marked an officer on "condition and efficiency of command", which was not defined. Now this item was subdivided into two categories, (1) efficiency of personnel; and (2) efficiency of material. In the writer's opinion these definitions, while still allowing for wide interpretation, marked the beginning of an effort to narrow down the natural differential among reporting seniors.

As mentioned earlier, in 1865 a numerical scale replaced the descriptive word; however, this rating method was dropped with the 1891 form. In 1910, the rating method was again revised and this time a numerical scale was added to the descriptive word as follows:

Excellent	= 3.5-4.0
Very Good	= 3.0-3.5
Good	= 2.5-3.0
Indifferent	= 2.0-2.5
Poor	= 1.0-2.0
Bad	= 0.0-1.0

This method established a system for assigning more discriminating marks. As in the past, the only favorable marks fell within the range of 2.5 to 4.0, or "good" to "excellent".

In 1912, the Fitness Report forms were combined and only one form was used for reporting on all officers. For the first time the form was divided into two sections, the first of which was to be completed by the ratee. In this section, among other items, the officer was allowed to state his duty preferences, if any. This appears to be the first indication that the Fitness Report would be used for something in addition to promotion, namely, assignment to duty. The instructions on the form stated:

Reports on fitness form the basis for assignments to duty. They are decisive of the service careers of the individual officers, as also for the efficiency of the entire Navy, which demands the right man in every place. The preparation of these reports is therefore one of the most important and responsible duties of superior officers. (Department of the Navy, 1956b, p. 90).

Another newly established item to be completed by the reporting senior was an officer's fitness for promotion. The reporting senior was also given an opportunity to recommend an officer for special training or study--the first indication that the Fitness Report might have been influential in assigning officers to schools.

From 1912 to 1923 minor revisions in both the items to be marked and the marking system occurred. The first indication that Reports were not being submitted promptly occurred with the advent of the 1917 Report form when an instruction on the form read as follows:

The importance of keeping the efficiency records of officers continuously complete in all respects requires prompt rendition of the same, and the responsibility is twofold . . . the responsibility of the [reporting senior] to see that the reports are promptly submitted to him by those upon whom he reports, and his own responsibility with respect to the expeditious completion of the reports and the forwarding of the same according to the instructions that apply in each case. (Department of the Navy, 1956b, p. 95).

Today, the problem still exists as can be evidenced in notes from the Chief of Naval Personnel (Semmes, 1964) and in interviews with the Head of the Fitness Report Branch in the Bureau of Naval Personnel (Young, 1965).

VI. CHANGES FROM 1923 to 1951

The 1923 revision of the Fitness Report was an extensive one and included shortening of the form from four to two pages. Some items were deleted while new items were added, but perhaps the most significant change was that of the marking system. A list of traits, or variables, was followed by columns in which the reporting senior had only to mark an "X". The column headings, which indicated that the degree to which an officer exhibited these traits, were as follows:

Superior
Above Average
Average

Below Average
Inferior

Their appearance on the Fitness Report is illustrated in Figure 1. There are two significant points to be made concerning this change. First the degrees of accomplishment listed above and illustrated in Figure 1 were defined, not by a numerical score as in the past, but in words. For instance, an "X" placed in the Superior column meant that the officer was "above the great majority". Second, the qualities and performance of duty of the officer were to be considered in comparison with similar characteristics of all other officers of the same grade and approximate length of service of whom the reporting senior had knowledge. Accordingly, all definitions related to an officer's standing in relation to the majority--above, equal, below--and at the extremes, above the great majority and below the great majority. Researchers found that although the system was simple and took little time, "top grading" and "halo effect" became more prominent the longer it was used. The system introduced two distinctly valuable advantages, simplicity and brevity. But, after it had been in use, grades were being inflated and on a comparison basis were not discriminating in terms of quality.

In 1928 the rating scale was revised. Traits were still listed, followed by columns in which the reporting senior had only to check the appropriate response. However, column headings which applied equally to all traits, as illustrated in Figure 1, p. 22, were eliminated. Instead, each trait, which was now defined, was followed by columns, each of which was defined. Within each column there were five gradations for the response. From left to right these gradations signified "best" to "poorest". This was an effort to discriminate, as was the intent in 1910, when a grade of excellent referred to any mark between 3.5 and 4.0. A portion of the 1928 Fitness Report form is illustrated in Figure 2, p. 23.

From 1928 to 1944 there were both item and form changes, but in 1944,

	Superior	Above average	Average	Below average	Inferior
Aptitude for the service		X			
Conduct		X			

FIGURE 1

PORTION OF SECTION 8 OF OFFICER FITNESS
REPORT FORM OF 1923 (FROM DEPARTMENT
OF THE NAVY, 1956b)

Military Bearing (With reference to military carriage and dignity of demeanor.)							
	Exceptional in carriage	Carries himself well	Bearing fair	Unmilitary in bearing			

FIGURE 2

PORTION OF SECTION 12 OF OFFICER FITNESS
REPORT FORM OF 1923 (FROM DEPARTMENT
OF THE NAVY, 1956b)

in an effort to devise a system which would truly discriminate, the marking system was changed. Research Report 56-2 states that the revision occurred in 1945; however, a Fitness Report form insert dated August 1944 with this major change can be found in a book containing information for officers and officer candidates written by Thompson and Stone (1945). A comparison rating utilizing percentages was introduced. Column headings, which had been deleted with the advent of the 1928 form, returned, similar to 1923. Interesting to note is the similarity of intent but difference in terminology of the 1923 and 1944 Reports:

<u>1923</u>		<u>1944</u>
Superior	= Above the great majority	Within top 10%
Above Average	= Above the majority	Within next top 20%
Average	= Equal to the majority	Within middle 40%
Below Average	= Below the majority	Within next 20%
Inferior	= Below the great majority	Within bottom 10%

Instructions for reporting officers were as follows:

In making the comparison of officers with all others of the same rank and corps, keep in mind that the group . . . will fall into a normal distribution when graded on any trait or factor--that is, there will be a small number at the lower end, a larger group in the middle, and a small group at the top ... (Thompson and Stone, 1945, p. 182).

Figure 3 illustrates a portion of the 1944 Fitness Report form.

While provisions for showing officers their Fitness Reports when they contained adverse ratings had been made long before this time, the 1944 form was the first with instructions that indicated that Fitness Reports would be of greatest value to officers if reporting seniors would discuss them with their officers when possible.

The 1945 revision, which was very similar, changed some wording, added a few more general instructions, and in its instructions to reporting seniors put more emphasis on reporting seniors making every effort to show the report to the ratee. A new section was added to indicate whether the officer

E. CONDUCT AND WORK HABITS	How does this officer compare in:	Not Observed	Within Bottom 10%	Within Next 20%	Within Middle 40%	Within Next 20%	Within Top 10%
	1. ABILITY TO WORK WITH OTHERS?						
	2. ABILITY TO ADAPT TO CHANGING NEEDS AND CONDITIONS?						
	3. MILITARY CONDUCT - BEARING, DRESS, COURTESY, ETC.?						

FIGURE 3

PORTION OF SECTION 7E OF OFFICER FITNESS
REPORT FORM OF 1944 (FROM THOMPSON
AND STONE, 1945)

reported on had or had not seen the report.

While available research does not evaluate the shortcomings of previous forms, several studies have indicated that the 1945 form was not effectively discriminating between officers. Cagle (1947) reports results of a study of 1,188 Fitness Reports. He attempted to find if the actual distribution of marks varied with the "correct" or normal distribution of marks, as defined on the form in percentage categories. The results showed a marked variance upward and are tabulated in Table I.

Needham (1960) analyzed the 1945 form in the four primary areas of evaluation, (1) present assignment; (2) desirability; (3) comparison; and (4) qualities. In the areas of present assignment, desirability, and qualities, nearly 60 per cent of the officers studied were marked as "outstanding", while in the area of comparison almost 55 per cent were marked similarly.

Despite the "top grading" the 1945 Report form continued to be utilized until the year 1951.

VII. CHANGES FROM 1951 to 1962

The year 1951 saw three revisions in January, March and October. The first was very similar to the 1945 report except that all references to percentages were removed and column headings were changed to unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, excellent and outstanding. In addition, the first specific reference to an officer's ability to work cooperatively with civilians was made. A portion of the January, 1951 Fitness Report form is illustrated in Figure 4, p. 28.

The March revision returned to a two-page report and reverted to the marking system which was used in 1928, with minor changes. Column headings shifted the position of unsatisfactory from the far left to the extreme right.

TABLE I
AN ANALYSIS OF A REPRESENTATIVE NUMBER OF 1945 OFFICER
FITNESS REPORTS BY NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES

Percentage Group	Correct Distribution	Actual Distribution	Actual Percentage
Top 10%	119	494	41.6
Next 20%	238	578	48.7
Middle 40%	474	102	8.6
Lower 20%	238	12	1.0
Bottom 10%	119	2	0.0
Total	1188	1188	99.9

Source: Cagle, 1947.

E. CONDUCT AND WORK HABITS		NOT OBSERVED	UNSATIS- FACTORY	SATIS- FACTORY	GOOD	EXCEL- LENT	OUT- STANDING
	1. Ability to work cooperatively with individuals and groups whether military or civilian.				✓		
	2. Ability to adapt to changing needs and conditions.				✓		
	3. Military conduct-- bearing, dress, courtesy, etc.						✓

FIGURE 4

PORTION OF SECTION 7E OF OFFICER FITNESS REPORT
FORM OF JANUARY, 1951 (FROM DEPARTMENT
OF THE NAVY, 1956b)

The number of headings was reduced from five to four, with three of the columns divided in half to indicate whether an officer was high or low outstanding, excellent, or average. An illustration of a portion of this Report form is presented in Figure 5, page 30.

In October, 1951 a very minor but interesting revision occurred. Whereas in the March, 1951 form the reporting senior was to comment on the ratee's fitness for promotion, the later revision eliminated this point entirely.

According to Needham (1960) the October, 1951 Report showed improvement over the 1945 Report in the ability of reporting seniors to discriminate among their officers. The percentages of officers marked as "outstanding" in the primary areas of evaluation decreased 13 percent in present assignment, 8 per cent in desirability, 24 per cent in comparison, and 37 per cent in qualities.

In June, 1954 another major revision occurred. Officer-like qualities, which had numbered thirteen, were reduced to six. Half of the qualities were carry-overs from previous reports, but three new qualities emerged, namely, (1) professional knowledge; (2) promotion potential; and (3) management effectiveness. This Report eliminated the requirement for stating an officer's proficiency in a foreign language. It added "collateral duties" as a factor in rating performance of duties. It required that any outstanding qualifications in a specific field, such as administration, planning, etc., be appraised and instructed the reporting senior to state his estimate of the officer's capacity for original and construction professional work and then to indicate to what degree his performance had reflected that capacity. An officer was graded on his performance of duties in terms of outstanding, excellent, competent and efficient, satisfactory, and inadequate. The number of columns in marking officer-like qualities increased to five with all

NOT OBSERVED	OUTSTANDING	EXCELLENT	AVERAGE	UNSATIS- FACTORY
(m) MILITARY BEARING AND NEATNESS OF PERSON AND DRESS (With reference to dignity of de- meanor, correctness of uniform, and smartness of appearance.)	Excep- tional. ✓	Very good.	Fair.	

FIGURE 5

PORTION OF SECTION 13(m) OF OFFICER FITNESS REPORT
FORM OF MARCH, 1951 (FROM DEPARTMENT
OF THE NAVY, 1956b)

columns except "adverse" divided in half, as had been done in 1951. A remarks section was included in this form in which any mark assigned in the extreme left or right columns (high outstanding or adverse, respectively), had to be justified with a brief description of the specific factors which were considered in making the evaluation. Figure 6 illustrates a portion of the 1954 Report form.

The implicit requirement that all officers see their Fitness Reports (1945) became past history when, in 1954, instructions stated that, as a general rule, officers should not be shown their Fitness Reports unless the Report contained adverse ratings. However, there were blanks provided for the reporting senior to indicate whether the officer had seen the Report.

Needham's study (1960) indicated more improvement in the discrimination of evaluations over both the 1945 and 1951 Fitness Reports. The percentages of officers marked as "outstanding" in the primary areas of evaluation decreased, from the 1951 Report, 40 per cent in present assignment, 12 per cent in desirability, 16 per cent in comparison, and 12 per cent in qualities. Figure 7, p. 33 depicts the percentages of officers marked as "outstanding" in the four primary areas of evaluation with the 1945, 1951, and 1954 Fitness Report forms. The analysis of these marks was conducted by Needham (1960). In each evaluation area the percentage of officers marked as "outstanding" decreased. Needham attributed this decrease to the form, i.e., the more current form required reporting seniors to exercise more discrimination in their evaluations.

Subsequent research by King and Wollack (1960) indicated a small but progressive increase in the percentages of officers receiving high marks from 1954 to 1958. However, the 1954 form remained in use until 1962.¹

¹Historical data from Research Report 56-2 terminates with the 1954 Fitness Report.

(e) PROMOTION POTENTIAL (Consider his capacity to handle jobs of increased scope and greater responsibility, ability to learn rapidly, personality, self-improvement efforts, special abilities, and training.)

NOT OBSERVED <input type="checkbox"/>	Capable of increased responsibility and rapid advancement.	Very promising promotional material.	Demonstrates promise for further growth at moderate rate.
	*	✓	

Present job is taxing his capabilities. Requires considerable amt. of training.	Definitely limited. (Adverse)
	*

FIGURE 6

PORTION OF SECTION 19(e) OF OFFICER FITNESS
REPORT FORM OF 1954, (FROM DEPARTMENT
OF THE NAVY, 1956b)

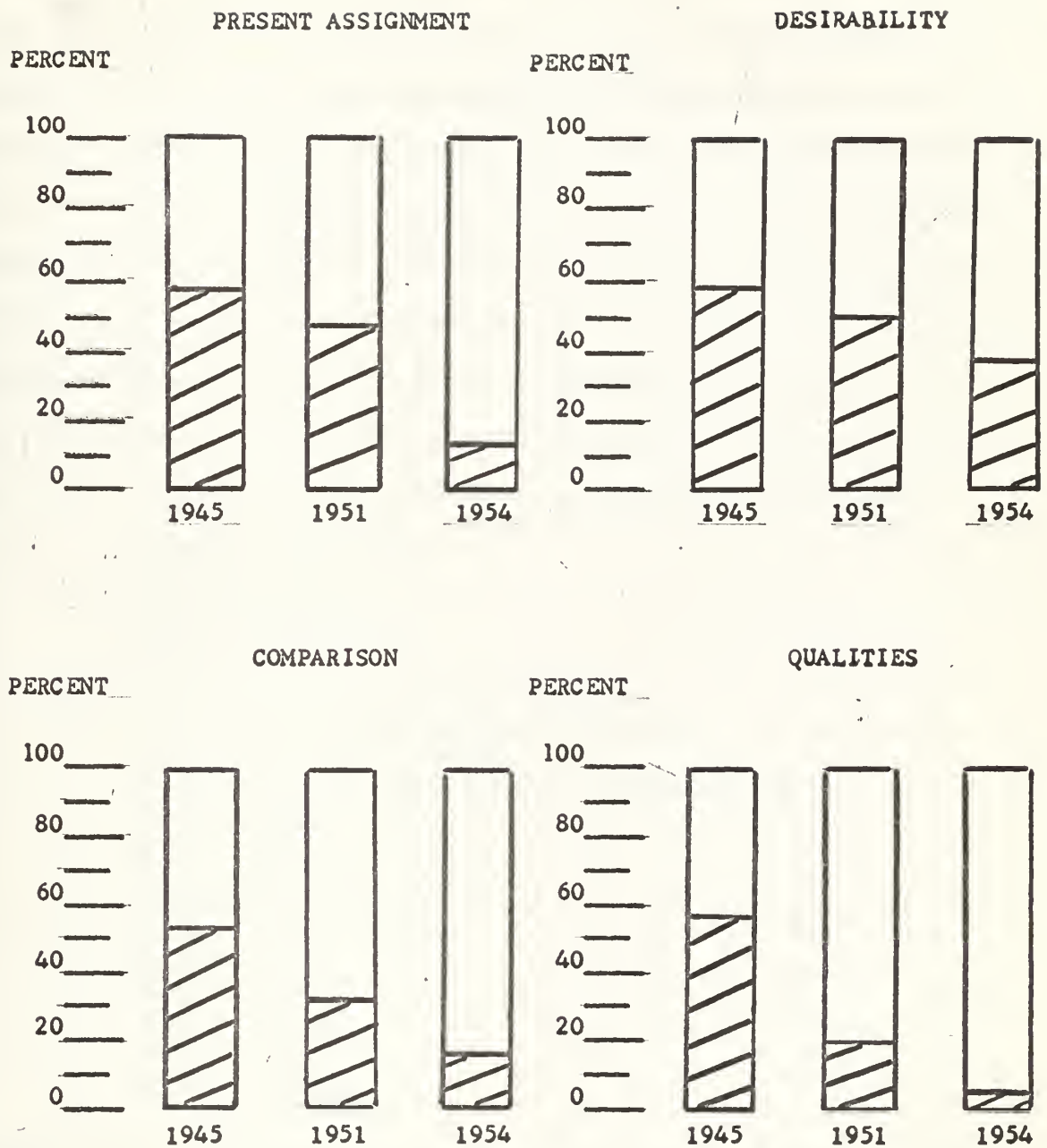


FIGURE 7

ANALYSIS OF OUTSTANDING MARKS ASSIGNED IN FOUR
PRIMARY AREAS OF EVALUATION
IN 1945, 1951, AND 1954
BY PERCENTAGES (FROM
NEEDHAM, 1960)

VIII. CHANGES FROM 1962 to 1965

In April, 1962 a new Fitness Report form was introduced. Interestingly, the new form contained items very similar to those found in a newsletter promulgated by former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Anderson, to all officers under his command in the Sixth Fleet. This newsletter was written while the admiral was Commander of the Sixth Fleet. In this newsletter he commented on the considerations he took into account in describing an officer's performance. "... [I] usually cover some or all of them in the written description of that officer's performance of duty where they do not lend themselves to the check-off provided in the form itself." (Department of the Navy, 1961). The considerations to which he alluded are as follows:

1. Personal Appearance
2. Military Bearing
3. Mental Alertness
4. Physical Endurance
5. Industry
6. Ability to express onself orally
7. Ability to express oneself in writing
8. Ability to make decisions
9. Contact with people outside the Naval Service.
10. Being a good shipmate
11. Imagination
12. Knowledge of one's own job
13. Breadth of Vision
14. Manner of Performance
15. Cooperation
16. Reliability
17. Social Grace
18. Sense of Humor
19. Personal Behavior
20. The Distaff Member

Of these twenty considerations, at least 70 per cent are explicitly incorporated in the revised form. Whereas the 1954 Report had abbreviated the number of qualities to be marked, the 1962 revision added more to the list, for a total of fourteen. In this respect the revision was much like the Report forms of the twenties.

Of interest was Admiral Anderson's consideration of the distaff member

and her importance in the total picture of an officer's performance, especially when he had to comment on the fitness of an officer for a special assignment. Originally, the revised form was to include space for the reporting senior to indicate his opinion of the officer-wife team as representatives of their service and country "considering the requirements for social and diplomatic contact with officials and people of our own and foreign countries ..." (Army, 1962, p. 12). Included also were specific checking categories of "particularly suitable", "suitable", "not observed", or "not applicable" (Bush, 1962; Army, 1962). The New York Times (March 9, 1962) indicated that the Navy's position was that it was eager, since the social graces of the Americans were under constant and often critical scrutiny, that the impressions to which wives contribute so much be as favorable as possible, for the nation and the Navy. The same issue of the Times indicated that views from wives were anything but happy. Then Congress entered the arena with the thought that the Armed Services Committee should look into the matter. Representative Samuel S. Stratton was quoted as saying, "...I'm not sure this type of information should be formally noted on an officer's fitness report. The practice certainly could be abused and work against some officers." (New York Times, March 9, 1962, p. 15). A day later Representative Stratton called on the Armed Services Committee to investigate the Navy's plan (New York Times, March 10, 1962). Pressure from Representative Carl Vinson, Chairman of the Committee caused an "all stop" on the proposed revision (Navy Times, March 24, 1962). Though some Navy officers who were familiar with the background of the revision and its intent were surprised at the reaction over the proposal, many objected because they felt that it opened "the way to evaluation of the officer on the way his wife juggles her teacup or plays her bridge hand, not on his professional ability." (Navy Times

March 24, 1962, p. 4).

Finally, Navy Secretary Fred Korth ordered the controversial part removed from the forms:

I feel this information on the "officer-wife team" is essential in considering overseas assignments but I do not believe that a report designed to rate officers performance is the place to record the data.

... I am concerned that an evaluation of an assignability factor, which the report on the officer-wife team is in my opinion, may at some future time become a point on which promotions hinge. (Navy Times, April 7, 1962, p. 38).

On April 30, the revised form, for captains and below and which is in use today, was promulgated without the husband-wife team information. The new form includes a receipt which is sent to the officer reported on when his Report is filed in the Bureau of Naval Personnel. This receipt system was one of several recommendations offered in a research paper by Dunn and Ortland (1962).

A completely new section, "for future assignments", is added. In this section, the reporting senior makes recommendations as to the duty assignment, both at sea and ashore, for which he considers the officer to be the most qualified. In considering the desirability of the officer, the reporting senior reports his impressions, not in general terms as in previous forms, but in operational, staff, or administrative, and foreign duty assignments. Reporting seniors must also specify whether the Report is based on daily contact and close observation, frequent observation, infrequent observation, or records and reports only (Department of the Navy, 1962). This section is intended to throw light on the quality of the evaluation.

See-saw trends of showing or not showing, discussing or not discussing the Report with the officer have again changed their tone. Reporting seniors are now encouraged to discuss the Report with the officer, but not necessarily

to show it. Minor weaknesses must be discussed with the officer, and comments about these weaknesses are invited. Reporting seniors must also indicate the trend of the officer's performance since the last Report.

Eliminated from the new form are the reporting senior's evaluations of an officer as an executive or division officer and his promotion potential.

The marking system employed is a combination of ranking and rating scales used in earlier forms. Similar to the 1954 Report, an officer is graded on his performance of duties in terms of outstanding, excellent, very good (instead of competent and efficient), satisfactory, and inadequate. The major change occurs in the evaluation of traits or "qualities" of leadership. The qualities are listed and defined and are followed by eight columns. Each column is headed by a word or phrase which indicates the degree of an officer's performance. Column headings for trait evaluations were in vogue in 1951, but had been eliminated in 1954. A portion of the 1962 Fitness Report, section 20 (Leadership) is illustrated in Figure 8.

A comparison of descriptive words used in 1962, 1944 and 1923 follows:

<u>1962</u>	<u>1944</u>	<u>1923</u>
1 out of 100	----	----
Exceptional	Within top 10%	Superior
Superior	Within next top 20%	Above Average
Excellent	Within middle 40%	Average
Acceptable	Within next 20%	Below Average
Marginal	Within bottom 10%	Inferior
Unsatisfactory	----	----

It can be seen that the 1962 Report has added two categories at the extremes. In addition, the term "excellent" is now defined as equal to the majority, whereas in 1923 the word "average" was used to denote the majority. This type of thinking, i.e., that the above average naval officer is better than average, is evidenced in statements made by the Navy's former Chiefs of

(e) INITIATIVE (His willingness to seek out and accept responsibility)		NOT OBSERVED	1 OUT OF 100 OUTSTANDING	✓	EXCEPTIONAL	SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	ACCEPTABLE	MARGINAL	UNSATIS- FACTORY (ADVERSE)
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FIGURE 8

PORTION OF SECTION 20(e) OF OFFICER FITNESS REPORT
FORM OF 1962 (FROM NAVPERS 310, REV. 4-62)

Naval Personnel and Naval Operations. Vice Admiral Smedberg stated:

. . . the level of competence among naval officers is high and, therefore, competition is keen. With comparatively few mediocre officers in a particular group, it is a foregone conclusion that some well qualified, valuable officers will fail of selection when quotas are limited. (Smedberg, 1961, p. 2).

Admiral Anderson wrote:

Without being overly conceited, we in the Navy know that, to begin with, we are rather above the average cut of American manpower.

.
. . . you should be able in your own mind to differentiate between those who are the "best", and those who are "better" in a large group in which nearly everyone is "good". (Department of the Navy, 1961, pp. 1, 6.).

The effectiveness of the 1962 Report form has yet to be documented.

However, only five months after it had been published, Vice Admiral Smedberg indicated that many reporting seniors were using the one-in-one hundred rating block even though these marks were not in line with their previous marking patterns. He cautioned reporting seniors that should this trend continue, the form would become less effective (Smedberg, 1962). Three years later, in 1965, the Head of the Fitness Report Branch implied that the Report is not effectively differentiating between officers.²

In 1964, a new Report on the Fitness of Flag Officer, form 310A, was introduced. Instructions governing its preparation and submission were promulgated in Bureau of Naval Personnel Instruction 1611.13 (Department of the Navy, 1964b).

To be considered in this form are the officer's professional performance, personal qualities and promotion potential. Reporting seniors are to recommend future assignments. These areas of evaluation are completely in narrative form and guidelines for each area are provided by the instruction.

²Statement based on information received from Commander S. Saunders, Jr., U. S. Navy, July, 1965. Permission granted for inclusion in this paper.

Similar to the 1962 Fitness Report form, reporting seniors are to indicate the type of information or observation on which the report is based. Finally, there is provision for the reporting senior to indicate whether or not the officer has seen the report. As is and has been the case since 1891, Reports containing adverse ratings are referred to the officer for statement.

IX. SUMMARY

The Navy officer Fitness Report is examined in detail from 1818 until 1965. The writer's close examination of the numerous revisions is based on a review of the available literature on the evolution of the Fitness Report in addition to an analysis of original and duplicated copies of the Fitness Report forms for the years covered. Though the changes have included (1) increases and decreases in the number of pages; (2) increases or decreases in the numbers and types of forms; (3) the inclusion and/or exclusion of various trait evaluations; and (4) improvements in design, the writer concentrates more heavily on the rating scales which were employed.

Throughout the years there has been considerable effort to devise a form which would differentiate between the better and poorer officers. Words and phrases such as "excellent", "superior", "outstanding", "within the top 10%", and "one-out-of-one hundred", which have been incorporated in Fitness Reports from 1865 to 1962, have been used in an attempt to identify those officers who were and are more distinctly qualified than their contemporaries. But, since 1923, it appears that most research efforts have been channeled toward finding the form which would effectively discriminate among officers.

Rating scales in columnar form and designed for ease of marking have attempted to force the reporting senior to spread his evaluations. Columns have been divided into sections which denote the degree of performance. In

1928, columns were divided into five sections signifying "best to poorest", in a particular category. Since then, columns have been divided in half to signify "high or low" in each category. The use of definitions for terms describing an officer's performance began in 1923. Since that time greater use of this tool has been made in an effort to create a common standard for all reporting seniors. Finally, in 1962, the columns were expanded to allow more room for "positive" evaluations.

Perhaps one point in history is more prominent than all the others. Despite all the efforts to create and design a report which would give the best information for use in such personnel actions as promotion and assignment, the effectiveness of the present form is questionable.

CHAPTER IV.

MAJOR PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE COMPLETION OF THE FITNESS REPORT

In Chapter III an analysis was made of the painstaking development of the Fitness Report up to and including the current forms in use, NAVPERS 310 (revised April, 1962) for reporting on captains and below, and NAVPERS 310A (March, 1964) for reporting on Flag officers. This Chapter was preceded by an overview of the activities of the promotion board as is generally known, or is at least available, to most naval officers. The writer chose to discuss this board rather than other formal selection boards which affect a naval officer's career because of the relative importance attached to it by most officers. Certainly, selection for (1) augmentation into the Regular Navy; (2) postgraduate school and service college; (3) special assignments; and (4) continuation are important. In addition, command selections for both aviation and surface operation commands are of the utmost importance to an officer's career. Indeed, the action of boards like these will ultimately affect the action taken by the formal promotion board convened by the Secretary of the Navy. But this latter board is perceived as being more important because, according to existing promotion laws, non-selection for a prescribed number of times means that either an officer will no longer be able to continue his career in the Navy, or he will be required to terminate his career earlier than he had desired and possibly expected. That either of these consequences should occur presents a situation which at best is difficult to accept and which more often than not may give rise to problems of adjustment.

The principal criteria for each of the boards mentioned above include performance, but "while each promotion board establishes its own detailed criteria, experience has shown that . . . performance is the primary consideration." (Smedberg, 1961, p. 1). The vehicle through which an officer's

performance is reflected in the Fitness Report. Accordingly, it takes on increased importance. A properly developed and administered system can aid in determining whether an officer should be considered for promotion. But herein the problems are introduced, for the system must be developed and administered by humans, and therefore, errors occur and biases are introduced.

Many research papers, books and articles have discussed the nature of rater errors. These have been carefully studied in the military because evaluating the performance of officers and preparing the Fitness Report are two of the greatest responsibilities of a reporting senior relative to preserving and improving the quality of the officer corps. This human endeavor cannot be standardized completely because human judgment varies from person to person.

...In judging human beings there are psychological forces which relate to interpersonal behavior, interpersonal affection, and a multitude of social interactions which greatly influence the outcome of the judgments. (Fields and Friedman, undated, p. 2).

The biases generated in judging human beings are described in the following pages. Unless otherwise noted, the data concerning these biases, or errors are extracted from Guilford's work (1954) in the techniques of psychological measurement.

I. FACTORS INFLUENCING OBJECTIVITY IN RATING

The Error of Leniency

This error arises because raters tend to rate those whom they know well, or in whom they are ego-involved, higher than they should and regardless of trait. Those raters who are aware of this failing may consequently "lean over backwards" and rate individuals lower than they should. When the rating is too low, the error is known as one of negative leniency. The leniency error is more commonly known as one which would be committed by individuals

who are called "easy raters", or on the other hand, are called "hard raters". The positive leniency error is the most common one. (This was pointed out in Chapter III when investigations showed that a considerable percentage of naval officers were marked "outstanding" with both the 1945 and 1951 Fitness Report forms.) Guilford (1954) indicates that some investigators have taken steps to anticipate this error and have arranged rating scales to help counteract it. These scales have few unfavorable descriptive terms and most of the range is given to degrees of favorable reporting. The rating scales in the Navy Fitness Report have evolved to this point. While these rating scales were discussed in an earlier chapter, they are shown in Figure 9 so the reader can see the changes through the years. The import of the rating scales for 1865 and 1910 is not one of construction of the scales. During 1865 there were no column headings; rather, descriptive terms were assigned to "impressions" a commander had of an officer's general qualifications and professional and other aptitudes. Again, in 1910, there were no column headings, but the commanding officer marked an officer on his performance of duty and characteristics utilizing descriptive terms. Beginning in 1923 rating scales were constructed in graphic form. The rating scales in Figure 9 for 1923 through 1962 depict the following:

1923:	Trait measurement
Early 1951:	Trait measurement
Late 1951:	Trait and performance measurement
1954:	Performance measurement
1962:	Trait measurement

For purposes of this paper, the writer was primarily concerned with the terms utilized to describe performance and/or possession of certain traits or qualities rather than actual construction of the scales.

The pattern of change with the Navy forms has been a little erratic, but clearly it can be seen that in the 1962 form most of the range is given

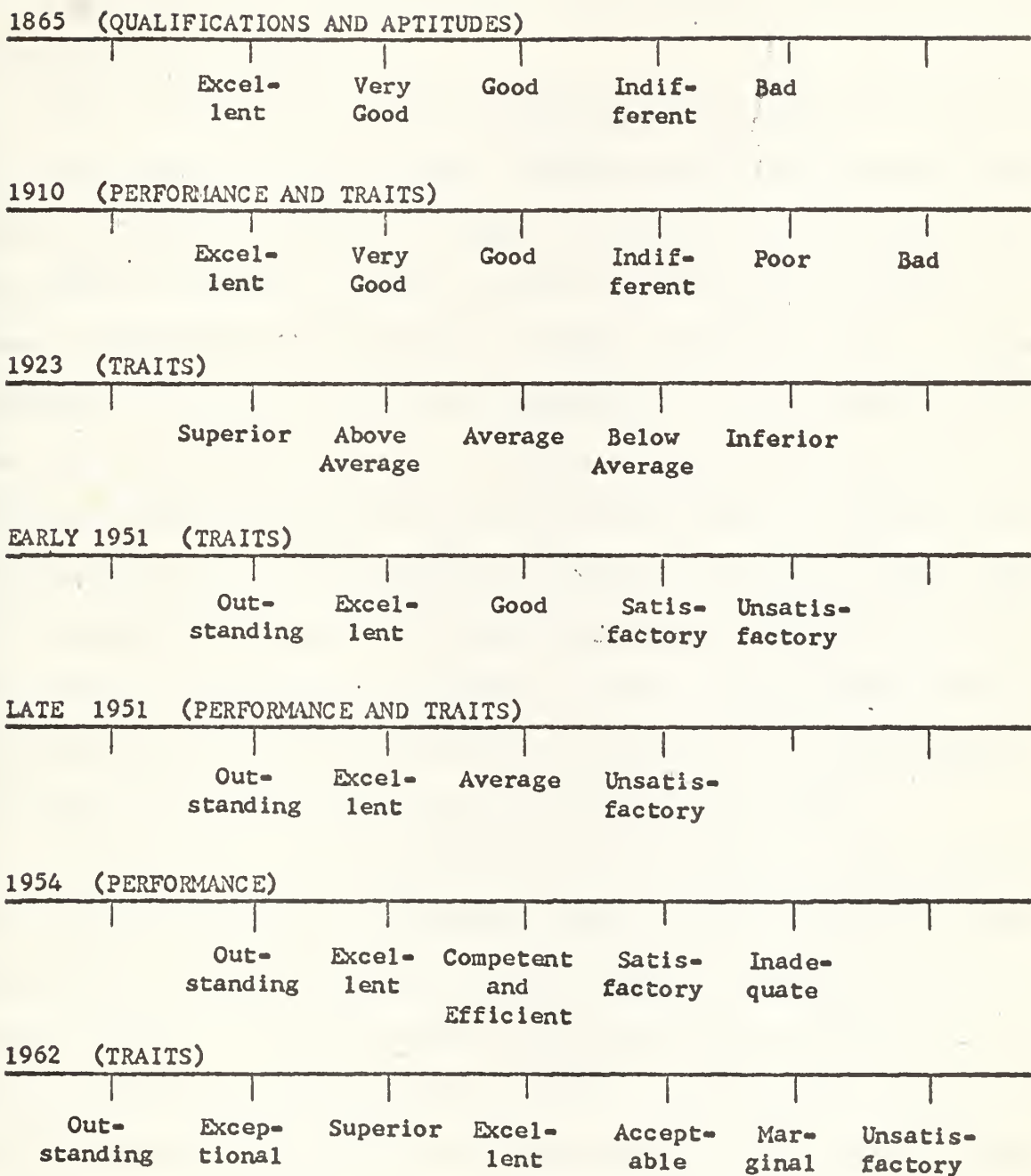


FIGURE 9

THE EVOLUTION OF NAVY OFFICER FITNESS
REPORT TRAIT AND PERFORMANCE
RATING SCALES

to degrees of favorable reporting. The term "excellent" is the mean rating, and it is anticipated and hoped for that there will be a distribution symmetrically about that point.

Kipnis (1960) reviews conditions external to the behavior of subordinates which have been found to promote interpersonal liking in general and may affect the extent of leniency in ratings. Among these variables are: (1) the degree of propinquity between the rater and ratee; (2) the amount of pressure under which the supervisor is working; and (3) the extent to which the supervisor expresses criticism of subordinates. In the first case, the sheer physical proximity between two persons will affect the probability of friendship developing between them; hence, ratings could be affected upward. In the second case, as workload demands increase and pressures mount, there will be greater likelihood of mistakes being made by subordinates and thus, less leniency in ratings can be expected. Finally, if supervisors fail to criticize their subordinates' work when they should, it is possible their criticisms will be reflected in harder ratings at a later date.

Creswell (1963), in her investigation of the hypothesis that confidentiality reduces rater leniency, found that there were few differences involving the non-confidential Annual Efficiency Report versus Confidential Efficiency Reports. A rise of ratings on successive Reports accounted for all the significant differences which occurred. The pattern of results obtained from Reports during 1958-1959 suggested that rating leniency simply increased with successive evaluation. This study of rating leniency is similar to a Navy study of Fitness Reports submitted in 1957 and early 1958 wherein distributions of Fitness Report marks for the combined group of officers, ensign through captain, showed small but progressive increases in the percentages of officers receiving high marks from 1954 to 1958 (King and Wollack, 1960).

Stockford and Bissell (1949) found, on the other hand, in their attempt to determine the value of merit rating as a measure of the performance of an individual, that supervisors are more lenient in evaluating the worth of the subordinate when they must confront the subordinate with the results of the rating than when results are withheld from him.

The Error of Central Tendency

This error is caused by the rater's hesitation to give extreme judgments and thus tends to displace individuals in the direction of the mean of the total group. This will occur frequently when raters grade individuals whom they don't know very well. Vinston (1959) defines this error as the "middle-of-the-road" policy in rating. In other words, in an attempt to avoid harming anyone, raters will attempt to average their ratings so as to avoid a high or low rating. A different slant is offered by Bowen (1962) who defines this error as a bias introduced when the rating officer assumes that all of his subordinates should be grouped around the average which is consciously or unconsciously determined by him. The Bureau of Naval Personnel has recognized this problem and in its instructions to reporting seniors states:

In instances where a reporting senior is uncertain as to the appropriate evaluation in any rating area, he should mark the "not observed" block rather than to arbitrarily assign a "middle-of-the-road" mark on the assumption that a subsequent comprehensive report will rectify any possible injustice. . . . [This malpractice] could result in faulty selection or assignment actions prior to being remedied by a later report. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 9).

The Halo Effect

A result of this effect is to force the rating of any trait in the direction of the general impression of the individuals rated and to that extent makes the ratings of some traits less valid. Guilford (1954) contends that the halo effect involves irrelevant criteria which contaminate and dilute

the validity of the rater's judgments. Fields and Friedman (undated) state that this tendency causes the traits to be statistically correlated with each other; in other words, a high score on one trait is associated with a high score on other traits and vice versa. Guilford indicates that because the halo effect introduces a spurious amount of positive correlation between the traits that are rated, ratings in which this effect has not been in some way canceled out or held constant should never be used in an attempt to find the intercorrelation of traits. Myers' study (1965), while dealing with job evaluation and not performance evaluation, was directed at removing a general halo factor characteristically emerging from job-rating studies. His approach definitely reduced the halo effect. The approach required that the original matrix contain at least one variable which correlates highly with nearly all other variables. By eliminating such a variable this would have the effect of removing the influence of halo from relationships between the remaining variables. He contends that matrices without such a variable would probably be in the minority in the domain of personnel ratings. While he did not recommend his approach as a substitute for proper construction of the rating form or training of raters, he believed it would be of value where the more conventional methods fail to produce meaningful factor configurations.

The halo effect, according to Symonds (1925), is more prevalent in a trait that: (1) is not easily observable; (2) is not frequently singled out or discussed; (3) is not clearly defined; (4) involves reactions with other people; and (5) is of high moral importance.

King and Wollack (1960) found that reporting seniors did not successfully differentiate among the different Fitness Report items but, for the most part, marked each of the items on the basis of an overall impression of the subordinate being evaluated.

Taylor and Erwin (1962) concluded that to the extent that several independent aspects of behavior being measured in a rating scale are not influenced by each other or by an overall impression or bias that the rater may have for the ratee, the greater validity of the scale may be inferred. In this area the Bureau of Naval Personnel instruction cautions the reporting senior to "make a determined effort to mark objectively avoiding any tendency which might allow general impressions, a single incident, or a particular trait, characteristic, or quality to influence other marks." (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 8).

The Logical Error

According to Guilford, this error occurs because judges are likely to give similar ratings for traits that seem logically related in the minds of the raters. While it increases the intercorrelation of traits as does the halo effect, the reason is different. Whereas in the halo effect it is the apparent coherence of qualities in the same individual, in the logical error it is the logical coherence of various traits irrespective of individuals. The logical error can be avoided partially by calling for judgments of objectively observable actions rather than abstract, and therefore semantically overlapping traits.

The Contrast Error

This error indicates a tendency for the rater to rate others counter to himself in a trait. Fields and Friedman (undated) cite an example of this error from the experience of a communicator in World War II. His commanding officer was well trained in communications and, as a result, demanded the highest standards of performance in communications. It was almost impossible to get a "well done" because no matter how much his performance exceeded normal expectations, it could not exceed the expert's standards. If the rater, on the other hand, were low in a particular trait he might tend to see others as having more "expertise". With these two types of raters excesses of low and high

ratings are likely to be seen.

Of course, the opposite kind of bias in the case of some traits may occur. In other words, a person who is exceptionally cooperative might allow his tolerance to blind him to evidences of uncooperativeness in others.

The Proximity Error

This error, similar to the logical and contrast errors, injects spurious correlations among rated trait variables. One reason for this phenomenon is the nearness in space for the rating of two traits, i.e., when traits which are quite similar are also adjacent, they tend to intercorrelate higher than when they are separated. Stockford and Bissell (1949) found that average intercorrelations between similar traits dropped significantly when five or more times removed from each other on the rating form. This error might also occur when a rater marks several traits at one sitting. Guilford contends that the problem could be alleviated if the rater would get into the habit of rating one trait at a time, thereby separating traits by greater time intervals. This contention is supported by Shapiro and Taguiri (1958).¹

The High-Level Tendency Error

This error results from raters who have a tendency to rank men in high-level jobs consistently higher than those occupying lower-level positions, or to rank men with seniority higher (Bowen, 1962). As an officer becomes more senior, the spread of the evaluation narrows.² While the writer has had no

¹Date from Guilford (1954) terminates with information concerning the proximity error.

²Statement based on information from Commander S. Saunders, Jr., U. S. Navy, Head of the Fitness Report Branch of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, June, 1965. Permission granted for inclusion in this paper.

opportunity to observe rating tendencies inherent in Fitness Report completion, this high-level tendency has been readily apparent in the enlisted evaluation report; to mark a Chief Petty Officer less than 4.0 is almost viewed with suspicion.

The Staff Factor

"The 'staff factor' is introduced at that point in time when the immediate superior is relieved and another takes over." (Bowen, 1962, p. 17). Bowen specifically relates this factor to those commands in which the rough draft of the Fitness Report is completed by the ratee's immediate superior, reviewed up the line and finally signed by the officer in command. In essence, what occurs is that the Report is composed by an entirely different personality, but the finished product is signed by the same officer in command. Bowen proposes that while an officer may have been marked "outstanding" by one superior, the relief's opinion may be quite different. But since the Fitness Report is signed only by the officer in command, succeeding Reports will indicate, erroneously, a waning effort on the part of the ratee.

This factor is closely related to the "inconsistency" factor noted by Rittenhouse (1952). This error occurs when a rater marks the ratee differently on consecutive reports despite the fact that the ratee's performance or behavior has not changed significantly.

The Bureau of Naval Personnel has recognized this problem also. Included in its instructions to reporting seniors is the following:

Any large shift of marks assigned an individual by the same reporting senior on successive reports is considered particularly significant and must be commented on in section 21 [of the Fitness Report]. Each reporting senior, therefore, should keep worksheet reports to insure that any changes in the marks assigned are intended. In no case will these worksheets be shown or passed on to the reporting senior's successor. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 7).

The Semantics Error

Bowen (1962) introduced this error as one more generally related to reports,

or parts thereof, in which the rater is forced to comment on the ratee's performance. An example is the rating officer's use of the word "impressive". Although he desires that this word describe the strength of an officer, it does not convey a clear-cut image to everyone who scans it unless it is supported and/or defined in a statement. One reader of such a word could interpret it to mean "commanding" while another, "imposing". The latter two words aren't much clearer. This, Bowen explains, is the problem of semantics. Bowen's contentions are supported by personnel in the Fitness Report Branch in the Bureau of Naval Personnel who review all Fitness Reports when they arrive in the Bureau. In addition, the instruction states:

Stereotyped comments may be harmful to the officer reported on and should be avoided. Each remark should be descriptive of the individual reported on and his manner of performance.³ In most instances, terse language . . . is more desirable than lengthy statements of explanation. All statements should be specific, not general. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 16).

II. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE FITNESS REPORT

Reference was made to summary sheets (briefing sheets) in Chapter II. Included in the items which make up these sheets is a compilation of marks received in the areas of (1) Present Assignment; (2) Desirability; (3) Comparison; and (4) Qualities of Leadership, or traits. The Fitness Report is also divided into these four areas and the bulk of the Bureau of Naval Personnel instructions are concerned with the proper completion of items within these areas. The instructions are detailed and are further reinforced by evaluation requirements and general guidelines for reporting seniors. In many respects the instructions are more clearly written for today's Report than they were for the completion of the 1954 Report. For instance, the instructions once stated, "Adequate evaluations . . . are essential . . ."

³ Underlining is the writer's.

(Department of the Navy, 1959, p. 69). Today they state, "Realistic objective evaluations . . . are essential . . ." (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 1). The current instruction stresses the importance of timeliness and accuracy of preparation and submission of Reports; it reminds reporting seniors that their workloads or other pressures will not constitute valid reasons for not meeting these constraints. It outlines those occasions which warrant Special Fitness Reports, whereas in previous instructions this section did no more than to "reference another reference", a perennial problem with many instructions.

Although the instructions are more clearly written and comprehensive, problem areas still exist. Those instructions which the writer feels are conflicting, or at least confusing, follow:

Section 14. Performance of Duty

In this section of the current Fitness Report, the reporting senior is to evaluate an officer's performance of duty in comparison with other officers of his grade and approximate length of service. The appearance of this section follows:

- (a) Present Assignment
- (b) Shiphandling and Seamanship
- (c) Airmanship
- (d) Collateral duties
- (e) As _____ Watch Officer
- (f) Technical Specialty (_____)
- (g) Command Potential or Ability
- (h) Administrative and Management Ability

The instructions outlined for this particular section read in part, as follows:

- a. The mark assigned in "Present Assignment" represents the overall performance of the officer and reflects the degree of professional qualification attained in the duties [assigned to the officer during the period of the report]. Other marks assigned in this section should, in combination, substantiate the mark assigned in "Present Assignment".

g. The mark in "Command Potential or Ability" should reflect displayed ability in a position or command responsibility or the reporting senior's estimate of the officer's potential⁴ for command positions.

h. The mark in "Administrative and Management Ability" should not only reflect observed performance in this area but also⁴ take into consideration the reporting senior's estimation of the officer's potential⁴ for further development in this area . . . (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 13, 14).

The problem is readily apparent. The instructions state that marks in parts (b) through (h) should substantiate the mark assigned in part (a), yet in two of these categories, (g) and (h), the reporting senior is instructed to estimate an officer's potential. Assume, for instance that an officer's performance in his present assignment is excellent. Further, he carries an 1100 designator (Unrestricted Line Officer) and cannot be marked in Seamanship because he is assigned to the shore establishment. He performs his collateral duties in an excellent manner and, as an Officer of the Day, he stands his watches, also in an excellent manner. Assume further that he has yet to develop a technical specialty and therefore cannot be graded. This leaves categories (g), for which the reporting senior has an option to mark the officer's command potential, and (h), for which the reporting senior is to include the officer's potential. If the reporting senior estimates the officer's potential in both categories as high outstanding, then conflict with the initial instruction begins. The array of marks which occurs in this hypothetical case appears in Figure 10. The marking pattern which results does not appear to substantiate the mark in "Present Assignment", yet the instructions were closely followed for each category. The writer submits that the apparent inconsistency has occurred because "potential"

⁴Underlining is the writer's.

	Outstanding Performance	Excellent perfor- mance. Frequently demonstrates out- standing performance.
(a) Present Assignment		✓
(d) Collateral Duties		✓
(e) As <u>OOD</u> Watch Officer		✓
(g) Command Potential	✓	
(h) Administrative and Management ability	✓	

FIGURE 10

EXAMPLE OF MARKS ASSIGNED TO AN
OFFICER IN SECTION 14 OF THE
1962 FITNESS REPORT (FROM
NAVPERS 310, Rev. 4-62)*

*The marks assigned in this Figure are the result of a
hypothetical case development.

and "present ability" have been rated in the same section and within a single item.

Section 15. Overall Evaluation

Figure 11 is an illustration of section 15 as it appears on the current Fitness Report. Included in Figure 11 are marks assigned by a reporting senior in a hypothetical case to be developed in the following pages.

Part (a) requires that the reporting senior designate an officer in comparison with other officers of his grade and approximate length of service, according to instructions on the Report form. However, the Bureau of Naval Personnel Instruction states:

In arriving at the mark in (a), the reporting senior will compare each officer within a particular category⁵ with the mental image he has of what this particular category (line, medical, dental, supply, etc.) of officer should measure up to; taking into consideration approximate length of service. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 14).

Again the problem is readily apparent. To rate a supply officer, say a commander, in comparison with the reporting senior's mental image of Supply Corps commanders is quite different than rating this commander in comparison with all commanders, with approximate length of service, in general. This inconsistency has a further effect on part (b) of the same section. After the reporting senior has marked all commanders, he must total the number of officers he has designated in each category and reflect this summation in part (b).

Item (b) will reflect to some extent the marking standards of the reporting senior to anyone reviewing fitness reports. Marks in blocks below the highest in other sections of the report may result in greater credit to the officer reported on than marks in the highest blocks when supported by figures in item (b) which indicate that the reporting senior has made an effort to obtain an objective spread in his evaluations A reporting senior

⁵ Underlining is the writer's.

NOT OBSERVED	One of the highly out- standing of- ficers I know	A very fine officer of great value to the service	A dependable and typically effective of- ficer	An accept- able offi- cer	Unsatis- factory (Adverse)
(a)	✓				
(b)	6	6	6	6	6

FIGURE 11

AN EXAMPLE OF A REPORTING SENIOR'S
ASSIGNED MARKS IN SECTION 15 OF
THE 1962 FITNESS REPORT (FROM
NAVPERS 310, Rev. 4-62)*

*The marks assigned in this section are the result of a hypothetical case in which the reporting senior followed the Bureau of Naval Personnel Instruction 1611.12.

marking an excessively large number of officers of the same grade in the highest blocks should realize that the summary in item (b) will reflect this fact and detract from such superlative marks. . . . (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 14a).

The command, say an Air Facility, may consist of department heads who are all commanders in different categories, i.e., Supply Corps for the Supply Department, Civil Engineering Corps for the Public Works Department, Medical Corps and Dental Corps for the Medical and Dental Departments, and a line officer for the Administrative Department. Possibly, there could be another commander, Chaplain Corps, assigned to the command. If the Bureau instruction is followed, it is conceivable that these six commanders may all be marked in the "outstanding" column as depicted in Figure 11, p. 57. If, on the other hand, they are compared with each other it is possible there might be a spread in the totals. The question is, which instruction is to be followed?

The Bureau makes provision, in the remarks section of the Report, for the reporting senior to justify any departure from the "normal" pattern of evaluations. But these totals are transcribed on the summary sheets which promotion board members review without the supporting comments and thus it becomes necessary for the board members to read through voluminous Reports in order to better understand the reasons for such departures.

Section 21. Comments

Among other aspects of performance included in this section, the reporting senior is to make comments on an officer's "minor weaknesses". Instructions on the 1954 Report form stated specifically, "In this section it is important that . . . any weaknesses which seriously affect his performance of duty, be reported." (Department of the Navy, 1956b, p. 149). However, instructions which apply to the current form state:

In the usual instance, wherein the officer reported on has no weakness of sufficient import⁶ to warrant their inclusion in the fitness report, the "Not Applicable" block shall be marked. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 17).

The words "sufficient import" leave room for a wide range of interpretation. What may be important to one reporting senior outside the realm of an officer's performance of duty may be unimportant to another who feels that as long as an officer is performing his duties well, weaknesses in his personal life are unimportant. Throughout this current school year, the writer has had occasion to discuss this very issue with many officers, some of whom have completed Fitness Reports. Differing opinions are the rule rather than the exception. Rajski's comments (1964) concerning the completion of Army Officer Efficiency Reports clarifies this point. She said:

. . .the narrative of the report must not be limited to describing only the good qualities of the rated officer but must also clearly state how he has performed his duties. It is equally important to record weaknesses and undesirable characteristics. Time and again career branches are requested to move an officer from a sensitive position because of inadequate performance, excessive use of alcohol or other reasons. Yet when the career branch reviews the officer's efficiency file, none of these things have been mentioned. (Rajski, 1964, p. 29).

General Instructions

For the purpose of continuity of record, Fitness Reports are to be completed for officer students based on observed overall performance and not only on academic performance or flight proficiency.

Student fitness reports containing evaluations of overall performance are of considerable value to an officer's record. This is particularly true in subsequent considerations for advanced schooling selections wherein an officer's general attitude and conduct in an academic environment are as much a factor as an evidenced academic ability. (Department of the Navy, 1962, p. 8).

⁶Underlining is the writer's.

The sub-section "Present Assignment" must be completed. Insofar as other items are concerned, recognition that an "under instruction" status provides less than an ideal basis for objective evaluation is given by the Bureau of Naval Personnel. Provision is made by the instructions to cope with this situation by emphasizing that reporting seniors make use of the "Not observed" columns in items where sufficient observation of students cannot be made. Further, reporting seniors are to state, in the "Comments" section, the various elements making up the course of instruction and this is considered as satisfying the minimum requirement.

The focal point of the problem appears to rest in the area of assigning a mark in "Present Assignment". No specific guidelines are provided so there might be standardization among or within military and/or civilian institutions. In the case of an academic institution, is the grade to be based on the quality point or grade average alone, or should it be based on both grade average and the trend of these grades since the commencement of the course of instruction? In the Business Administration and Economics Department of the U. S. Naval Postgraduate School, the minimum criteria, by which a mark is assigned in "Present Assignment", are quality point average and the trend of grades.⁷ However, in the General Line and Baccalaureate Program in the same school, the mark assigned in "Present Assignment" is based on quality point average only.⁸ In the latter case, if a student carries a quality

⁷ Statement based on information from Captain F. H. Burnham, U. S. Navy, Curricular Officer, Business Administration and Economics Department, U. S. Naval Postgraduate School, 15 July 1965. Permission granted for inclusion in this paper.

⁸ Statement based on information from Commander J. Dick, U. S. Navy, Curricular Officer, General Line and Baccalaureate Program, U. S. Naval Postgraduate School, 19 July 1965. Permission granted for inclusion in this paper.

point average of 2.5 to 3.0 he is marked high outstanding; if he carries an average of 2.0 to 2.5 he is marked low outstanding, and so on.

III. MULTIPLICITY OF PURPOSE

The explicit purposes of the Fitness Report have been referenced in previous chapters. They are listed as follows:

1. To provide a record of inventory of
 - a) duty performed and the manner of its performance.
 - b) the professional qualifications of the officer.
 - c) commendatory or censorious matter received by the officer.
 - d) disciplinary actions taken against the officer.
 - e) the general state of an officer's health and endurance as it affects his value to the naval service.
 - f) special qualifications possessed by the officer.
 - g) the officer's personal characteristics.
2. To utilize this inventory within the Navy for purposes of assignment to duty.
3. To form the basis for selecting the best qualified officers for promotion.
4. To form the basis for identifying those officers whose performance is unsatisfactory.
5. To form the basis for selecting officers for command, education, and continuation.

The implicit purposes of the Fitness Report follow:

1. To facilitate supervision of officers.
2. To reflect the officer's development of subspecialties and his proficiency therein.
3. To provide the officer with recognition for accomplishments.
4. To reveal to an officer where he stands so that he will be stimulated to improve his performance and growth.
5. To reflect the growth and development of officers.

Though we might agree that all these purposes serve to further the goals of the organization, they well might create a dilemma for the reporting senior who is responsible for the completion of these Reports. On the one hand, he

is to rate an officer "fairly and objectively", pointing out weaknesses and strengths in order to stimulate the officer to improve his performance and growth. He might rate conscientiously were it not for the fact, on the other hand, that a "developmental" approach may be the very reason for non-selection of the officer. This is especially true in the higher grades where chances for selection are limited. This statement would not be true were all reporting seniors to mark objectively. However, it is unrealistic to expect the conscientious rater to remain objective when others continue to mark high. Conscientious reporting seniors become disillusioned with the system when others mark high, and in the interest of being fair to their officers, they will also shift their marking standards upward. As a result, the promotion system is compromised.

Other forces tend to create a problem for the conscientious reporting senior. Kirchner and Reisberg (1962) found that less-effective supervisors are more lenient in ratings, particularly of poorer subordinates, and tend toward rating everyone the same; therefore, there is less spread between top-rated and bottom-rated subordinates. Those reporting seniors who are aware of this tendency on the part of some of their colleagues are almost forced to raise their marking standards in order to be fair to their own subordinates. This process tends to gather momentum as more reporting seniors begin to inflate the grades, and the Fitness Report system begins to disintegrate.

Guilford (1954) states that experience with ratings tends to indicate that the most effective method for improving ratings is to train raters carefully. If the rater knows about the existence of different errors he can be on the alert for them and take steps to counteract them. But, as pointed out in a study concerning the desirability and criteria for early promotion of naval officers, effective controls and realistic standards must also be provided to reporting seniors (Department of the Navy, 1958).

The writer submits that the requirement for a single Report to provide adequate information for assignment purposes, discriminating information for promotion and continuation purposes, and meaningful information for purposes of stimulating an officer's improvement in performance may be the crux of the problem. Are these purposes incompatible? Can a reporting senior employ a single rating and reporting method to accomplish these ends?

IV. SUMMARY

In this chapter, the writer outlines the major problems related to the completion of the Fitness Report by the reporting senior. These problems are viewed in three areas. First, rating errors and their implications are discussed. Second, an analysis is made of the current Fitness Report form and its related instructions. Third, the purposes to be served by the Fitness Report are outlined and questioned.

The writer points out that the 1962 Fitness Report incorporates a rating scale which Guilford (1954) has indicated is an attempt to counteract the "leniency error". This error arises because raters tend to rate those whom they know well, or in whom they are ego-involved, higher than they should and regardless of trait. Specifically, in section 20 of the Report, where the reporting senior is to evaluate an officer's leadership qualities, the scale has few unfavorable descriptive terms. Most of the range is given to degrees of favorable reporting. The writer shows that some of the instructions pertaining to the preparation of the 1962 Report are written in an attempt to eliminate, or at least decrease, the effects of rating errors or biases generated in judging human beings. These instructions are related to such errors as: (1) central tendency; (2) halo effect; (3) the staff factor, similar to the inconsistency error; and (4) the semantics error.

The writer recognizes the positive steps the Bureau of Naval Personnel has taken to present, with the 1962 Report form and the instructions pertaining thereto, a Fitness Report system with a strengthened objective base. At the same time, however, the shortcomings of the system are outlined. In summary, they are as follows:

1. Section 14. Performance of Duty. Instructions are conflicting and the reporting senior is asked to evaluate an officer's potential and his present ability in the same section.
2. Section 15. Overall Evaluation. The instructions for the preparation of the Fitness Report conflict with those on the Fitness Report form. Thus, the control element incorporated in this section is weakened.
3. Section 21. Comments. The instructions pertaining to minor weaknesses are not clear. The phrase "of sufficient import" is not considered to be an adequate standard.
4. General instructions. Instructions pertaining to the preparation of ratings for officers assigned to duty under instruction do not include a common standard by which reporting seniors can mark officers in the category "Present Assignment".

Finally, the writer questions whether reporting seniors can employ a single rating and reporting method to accomplish what appear to be incompatible ends. It is the writer's contention that should a conscientious reporting senior mark an officer objectively so that he will be stimulated to improve his performance, the outcome might be erroneously unfavorable and unfair to the officer concerned, if other raters continue to mark high.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A good promotion system should be objectively selective, should enjoy the confidence of officers whose lives are affected by it, and should provide incentive to strive for promotion. Without a belief in this system the morale throughout the officer corps would suffer (Department of the Navy, 1958). Confidence in the promotion board would require that the board be objectively selective. Officers who have never served as promotion board members cannot know how objective that board is. Without knowledge of promotion board procedures, they can only make assumptions. Some of these assumptions are based upon the promotion board's choice of selectees. Other assumptions are based upon an acceptance of a higher ranking officer's opinion. Such an opinion was advanced by the Chief of Naval Personnel in 1961 when he assured naval officers that the Navy's procedure for selection for promotion was widely acclaimed throughout the military service for its impartiality and objectivity (Smedberg, 1961).

Chapter II was written to eliminate part of the "veil of secrecy" which surrounds the promotion board. While it could not discuss all the details, since they are largely unknown, it did explain board composition, pre- and post-convening procedures and other general information related to the board's actions. The writer emphasized that each board is free to choose its own criteria. These criteria are developed in line with information furnished the board by the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Personnel, and the combined judgment and experience of the board members themselves. The

importance, or weight, assigned by the board to such elements as education, special qualifications, and career patterns varies from board to board. Because statutory requirements prohibit the selection of any board member to serve on the same board for two consecutive years and because criteria are not set forth in writing, it follows that each Board will determine its own criteria and the weight they are to be assigned. While these variations might be questioned, it was not a part of the writer's evaluation.

The Fitness Report is acknowledged to be the most important instrument for the selection of officers for promotion. It follows that this Report, which reflects an officer's performance throughout his career, should also be objective, should enjoy the confidence of officers, and should provide incentive to strive for improved performance. As in the case of the promotion board, confidence in the Fitness Report system requires that the Report be objective. The uncertainty of promotion board procedures precludes assumptions based on fact. However, objective measures of the confidence enjoyed by the Fitness Report system can be made. The writer is defining confidence as the ability of the Fitness Report to discriminate among officers. If confidence in the Report is related to its effectiveness and the effectiveness of the Report is related to its ability to differentiate among officers, then it is valid to define confidence as the writer has proposed.

In Chapter III the first indication of a diminution in confidence appeared in 1923 when researchers found that "top grading" was becoming more prominent the longer the Fitness Report form was used (Department of the Navy, 1956b). Rating scales were revised, terminology was changed, and instructions were lengthened, all in an effort to develop a common standard by which reporting seniors could rate. In addition, these changes were designed to "force" reporting seniors to expand their distribution of marks. Again,

in 1945, the system appeared to be losing its effectiveness when, according to Cagle (1947), over 41 per cent of his sample of officers of all ranks were marked in the category reserved for the top 10 per cent. Needham's study (1960) of this same Report showed that over 50 per cent of his sample were marked as "outstanding" in the four primary evaluation areas of present assignment, comparison, desirability, and qualities. The reader is cautioned that in neither study was there an indication that measures had been taken to ensure that appropriate weighting had been given to the individual ranks within the overall distribution.

The 1954 Report form appeared to enjoy the greatest and most sustained confidence; however, research by King and Wollack (1960) indicated small but progressive increases in the percentages of officers receiving high marks from 1954 to 1958. Special note was made by these researchers that the samples involved in 1954 and 1957 were different and were not subject to a seniority factor which evidently had accounted for changes in samples used in previous research for the years 1956-1957 and 1957-1958.

Whether the 1962 revision of the Fitness Report was a result of the aforementioned research is not known, nor could it be documented by the writer. The Report has been used for over three years and no research to evaluate its effectiveness has been published. The only indicators available to the writer are: (1) the former Chief of Naval Personnel's comments to reporting seniors, wherein he cautioned them that the Report would become less effective if their marking patterns continued in an upward trend (Smedberg, 1962); and (2) comments by the Head of the Fitness Report Branch, Bureau of Naval Personnel, that the Report is not effectively discriminating.¹ Vice Admiral

¹Statement based on information from Commander S. Saunders, Jr., U. S. Navy, July, 1965. Permission granted for inclusion in this paper.

Smedberg's comments were prompted by his concern over reporting seniors' excessive use of the one-in-one hundred block which is to be reserved for those officers who "exceed ALL others". With such evidence, though limited, it is difficult to conclude that the 1962 Report form enjoys the confidence of officers.

In Chapter IV the writer enumerated the positive steps the Bureau of Naval Personnel has taken to improve Fitness Report preparation by reporting seniors. The Bureau's instructions clearly attempt to forewarn reporting seniors of some of the common rating errors inherent in the judgment of human beings (Department of the Navy, 1962). These rating errors were discussed in detail. Although most of the current instructions are an improvement over those of previous years, the shortcomings are also apparent. In the writer's analysis of the 1962 Fitness Report and its related instructions, inconsistencies were found in two sections of the Report, namely: (1) section 14: Performance of Duty; and (2) section 15: Overall Evaluation. In section 21, a section reserved for comments which are to support the marks assigned by the reporting senior, a clear standard to determine what constitutes a "minor weakness" is not offered. The instructions state that weaknesses "of sufficient import" should be noted (Department of the Navy, 1962). Finally, there are no guidelines offered for the preparation of marks in the category of "Present Assignment" for officers assigned to duty under instruction.

Certainly, a re-examination of the present rating system will yield a degree of improvement in the mechanics of preparation of the Fitness Report. Whether this re-examination will substantially aid the promotion board in differentiating among officers is problematical. However, it is questionable whether the changes in format and terminology, the increasingly complex instructions and memoranda from the Bureau of Naval Personnel, or even factors used for evaluation itself will substantially improve the Fitness Report.

Furthermore, the human element embodied in the subjective evaluation task of the reporting senior is a stumbling block to the integrity of the Fitness Report.

The history of the Fitness Report is replete with such innovations. As Fields and Friedman (undated) succinctly noted, so many of these changes have depended upon the implicit theories of performance evaluation entertained by those in control of the system. It is an empirical fact that human beings differ widely in perception, attitudes, norms and values. It would be impossible to construct an evaluation form which would ensure the use of common standards of judgment. Perhaps the emphasis on change and improvements has been pointed in the wrong direction.

Many authors in the fields of management and organization have stressed the importance of control. Sayles (1964, p. 158) defines control, or monitoring, as a distinct administrative activity " . . . usually badly conceived and even less well executed . . ." The function of control involves measurements and corrections of performance to ensure that organizational objectives, and the plans devised to attain them, are accomplished (Koontz and O'Donnell, 1959).

The 1962 Fitness Report form is designed with two control elements. In the first case, reporting seniors are to report the total number of officers of like grade whom they have marked in all evaluation categories. By doing so, their marking standards are reflected to anyone reviewing the Reports. In the second case, reporting seniors are to indicate the frequency and type of observations upon which they have evaluated their officers. But, once these Reports are forwarded to the Bureau of Naval Personnel, what measures are taken to ensure their acceptability? As indicated by the Head of the Fitness Report Branch of that Bureau, screening of Fitness Reports includes:

1. a check to ensure that adverse remarks have been referred to the officer concerned for statement.
2. a check to ensure that agreement exists between grades assigned and the comment section which is designed to support those grades.
3. a check of "borderline" Reports, i.e., those Reports which are close to being unsatisfactory, which might require further investigation.
4. a check to ensure that the comments section of the Report is completed. Those without comments, or with very few comments are usually returned to the appropriate command for correction and resubmission.²

(The writer, although assured that guidelines for the above screening procedures are in existence, was unable to procure them.)

There are areas in which questions should be asked about any control system established for the purpose of guaranteeing uniformity in officer evaluation:

1. Has the Bureau of Naval Personnel developed a theory of significant differences in rating which will enable it to place certain limits on the occurrence or amplitude of the types of Fitness reporting being observed?
2. If there is knowledge of these limits on expected variation, which must be based on the inherent nature of the Fitness Report system, have consistent guidelines for screening procedures been set forth explicitly?
3. Assuming that the first two criteria have been met, are all reporting seniors subject to these control procedures?

Controls will be ineffective if they are not uniformly applied throughout the entire organization. Appropriate, well-defined controls, as opposed to procedures which may be a product of expediency, should not be considered as an encroachment on reporting seniors' prerogatives. They are an absolute necessity if the Fitness Report is to continue to form the basis for promotion and if the Report is to enjoy the confidence of the officer corps.

²Statements based on information from Commander S. Saunders, Jr., U. S. Navy, July, 1965. Permission granted for inclusion in this paper.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The current Fitness Report, and the related Bureau of Naval Personnel instructions, should be re-examined with a view toward the elimination of inconsistencies and gaps. Specifically, the sections and instructions to be re-examined are as follows:

- a. Section 14. Performance of Duty. Those sections which call for a reporting senior to mark an officer on his potential, such as command ability and administrative and management ability, should be removed from this section and inserted elsewhere on the form. Unless these factors are a part of the officer's present assignment, it is conceivable the marks assigned to him could be higher or lower than the mark in "present assignment", which they are to substantiate.
- b. Section 15. Overall Evaluation. A change in either the Bureau of Naval Personnel instructions or the instructions on the Fitness Report form should be made so that reporting seniors can mark from a common standard. The Bureau's instructions now state that, in the assignment of marks, a reporting senior should compare an officer with other officers in the same category (line, medical, etc.), with similar grade and approximate length of service. Instructions on the Report form, on the other hand, indicate that the comparison is to be made with other officers of similar grade and approximate length of service.
- c. Section 21. Comments. Unless it is the Bureau of Naval Personnel's intent to leave the question of what constitutes "minor weaknesses" to the reporting senior, clearer instructions should be published. These instructions should state whether an officer's weaknesses in his performance of duty or in his personal life are to be reported, or both, if evaluation of his personal life affects his performance.
- d. General Instructions. More exacting guidelines should be offered for assignment of marks in the category "Present Assignment" for officers in the status of duty under instruction. These guidelines are especially necessary when officers are enrolled in academic institutions.

2. A study to evaluate the effectiveness of the 1962 revision of the Fitness Report should be conducted by the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Research Division. The study should be designed to evaluate the continued effectiveness of the Fitness Report by comparing Reports for 1965 with those submitted

in 1963 and 1964.

3. A study should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and consistency of control procedures utilized by the Bureau of Naval Personnel in the screening of all Fitness Reports.

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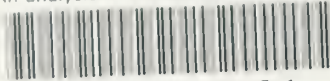
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